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## A PSYCHOLOGICAL DEFINITION OF RELIGION<sup>1</sup>

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No scientific discipline can be credited with much accuracy until it has succeeded in defining its principal terms. While recent contributions to the still youthful field of the psychology of religion have made the problems clearer, and at least partially solved some of them, no definition that has yet been proffered has met with wide acceptance. It is the purpose of this paper to suggest a working definition which, it is hoped, will prove to be reasonably satisfactory. It will be claimed that the definition adequately covers the established facts in regard to religion, that it furnishes a clear line of demarkation between religion and related fields, and that it is serviceable as a preliminary step toward the solution of the more difficult questions of the social significance and metaphysical validity of religion.<sup>2</sup>

An adequate definition of religion must satisfy two prerequisites. The first of these is that, to meet the requirements of logic, it must be exactly coextensive with the term defined.<sup>3</sup> It must include all varieties of all religions in the past as well as the present, and all of the logically possible forms that religions may conceivably assume in the future, no matter whether we believe these forms to be desirable or undesirable, uplifting or degrading, true or false. It must be thoroughly impersonal and descriptive, not normative.

<sup>1</sup> Portions of this paper were read at a joint session of the Western Philosophical and Psychological associations at the University of Chicago last April. The writer is indebted to Professors Lindley and Haggerty of Indiana University, Professor McGilvary, Dr. Kallen, and Dr. Otto of the University of Wisconsin, Professor Mead of the University of Chicago, and Rev. John R. Ellis of Bloomington, Ind., for suggestions, partly of a negative character, that have helped him to define his positions.

<sup>2</sup> The worthlessness for psychological purposes of the older definitions, advanced by philosophers and philologists, is patent. Cf. James H. Leuba, *Monist*, XV.

<sup>3</sup> Those acquainted with the literature will see the reason for emphasizing this truism. Professor George M. Stratton, in his valuable *Psychology of the Religious Life* (pp. 1-3), clearly states the proper psychological attitude, and admirably maintains it.

And it must avoid confusing religion with morals, magic, ethics, aesthetics, and other subjects that have borne in the past, or now bear, close relationship to it.

The second desideratum in a preliminary definition of religion for the purposes of functional psychology is that it should be an accurate description of the subjective attitude of the practitioners of religions, and not an assertion regarding the actual function of religion in human society, as determined by the objective observer. There are two reasons for this. In the first place, prudence demands that a functional psychologist make his definition frankly subjective in order to avoid the suspicion of being implicated in the psychologist's fallacy, a suspicion often, and perhaps not without reason, felt against investigators of his ilk. Secondly, it will be much easier to secure agreement upon the facts. The precise influence of any religion in social and moral evolution, complicated as is its interaction with other forces, is extremely difficult to determine. At the present time, there would be great difficulty in ascertaining the precise influence that Christianity has had upon European history,<sup>4</sup> and it would be yet more difficult to make a general statement that would apply to all religions. Personally I believe that it is possible to arrive at conclusions unambiguously favorable to Christianity as a factor of genuine and great service and importance in moral and social development, and I think that, to a less degree, this may be claimed of religion in general. In fact, a few points in regard to the social function of religion from the objective viewpoint will be mentioned toward the close of this paper; but the extreme difficulty of the subject makes it clear that it will be much easier to secure agreement upon the facts if a frankly subjective definition alone is attempted as a preliminary step toward the solution of the larger sociological and historical problem.

<sup>4</sup> The conclusions of Lecky, who attempted to estimate the influence of the Christian religion in certain periods of European history, and who still is our chief authority on this subject, are often delivered with hesitation (*A History of European Morals*). Westermarck's theory of the subjectivity of moral judgments apparently excludes a consideration of their objective function (*The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*). Hobhouse limits his conclusions to a few important but restricted details (*Morals in Evolution*, II, 155-59, and *passim*).

To meet these desiderata, therefore, I propose to set forth, in a manner that possibly may appear a little formal and pedantic, but will, I believe, make for accuracy, a definition of religion by genus and differentia. The genus will have to be broad enough to include within its bounds every conceivable form of religion. The differentia will need to be sufficiently narrow and specific to exclude from the species of religion everything included within the genus that is not properly religious. By thus seeking for breadth in our genus, and for narrowness and definiteness in our differentia, we ought to be able to satisfy all requirements and to secure a logical definition.

Of the various attempts to define religion psychologically, two types of definition are probably regarded at the present time, at least in this country, with most favor. One of these is the definition in terms of the conservation of values, which originated with Höfding,<sup>5</sup> and has recently been brilliantly defended by Irving King<sup>6</sup> and Edward S. Ames.<sup>7</sup> While most reviewers have recognized the merit of this definition in promoting the search for data and discovery of valuable psychological principles, many of them have criticised it as too broad and indefinite—as including more within the species of religion than properly belongs there. On the other hand, so far as I can recall, no critic has charged this definition with being too narrow in its scope. The other type of definition most in favor has been presented in various forms by a variety of writers, but has been most accurately stated by James H. Leuba,<sup>8</sup> who defines religion as belief in a “psychic, superhuman power.” This definition, I believe, is usually thought to be the more clear-cut and definite, but to lack the breadth and suggestiveness of the former definition. It is more accurate, but less fruitful in stimulating to further investigation. In other words, it is too narrow in its scope, just as the first definition is too broad.

If, then, we proceed to seek the genus of our definition in the conception of religion as concerned with the conservation of values,

<sup>5</sup> *Philosophy of Religion*.

<sup>6</sup> *The Development of Religion*.

<sup>7</sup> *The Psychology of Religious Experience*.

<sup>8</sup> *The Psychological Origin and Nature of Religion*, chap. vi; “Religion as a Factor in the Struggle for Life,” *American Journal of Religious Psychology and Education*, II. The quoted phrase appears only in the latter article.

we shall be reasonably sure to obtain enough breadth and suggestiveness, and if we seek our differentia along the lines indicated by Professor Leuba, we shall be able to find a differentia accurate and specific enough to avoid the danger of confusing religion with related subjects.

The genus of the definition proposed is therefore this: *the endeavor to secure the conservation of socially recognized values*. This definition is broad enough, it is believed, to bring religion under a genus that includes every type of it. Of course the genus includes many other things besides—some phases, at least, of morals, ethics, art, science—but that is not our present concern; the differentia, later to be discussed, will exclude these.

Each expression in the genus has been chosen advisedly. "Endeavor" makes it clear that the attempt to secure the conservation of values need not prove successful, even in the subjective belief of the follower of the religion. If he is making the endeavor he is making use of religion, though he do so with little faith, and afterward fully recognize the futility of his attempt. Thus Clovis may have had little faith in his gods before he ceased praying to them, and his confidence in the Christ of Clotilda may have barely been enough to make it seem worth while to try upon the battle-field the experiment of praying: "Clotilda says that Thou art the Son of the living God, and that Thou dost give the victory to those that put their trust in Thee. I have besought my gods, but they give me no aid. I see well that their strength is naught. I beseech Thee, and I will believe in Thee, only save me from the hands of mine enemies."<sup>9</sup>

The genus states that religion is the endeavor to secure the conservation of *values*. These may of course be of any conceivable sort. They have included almost everything that is a conscious object of desire. Food, the scalps and heads of enemies, deliverance from pestilence and disaster, riches, long life, posterity, counsel as to the future, fame, courage, wisdom, justice, forgiveness from sin, regeneration, Nirvana, blessedness, are only a few of the many values, private and public, that human beings have sought to conserve through religious means. As civilizations progress and

<sup>9</sup> Munro and Sellery, *Mediaeval Civilization*, p. 80.

moral insight advances, the values sought through religion become more moral and spiritual; and to an increasing extent values involving self-feeling and other self-conscious attitudes become prized more highly than those that refer exclusively to external objects and conditions.<sup>10</sup>

Our genus further asserts that values, in order to become religious, must be *socially recognized*. By this expression full recognition is accorded to the evidence given by W. Robertson Smith regarding the Semites,<sup>11</sup> and extended by Professor King to other races, that practices, if really religious, conserve values that the tribe recognizes, and are at least not inimical to its interests. On the other hand, the more vague and unqualified term "social values" is avoided. Properly understood, the adjective "social" can here only mean what is more precisely described as "socially recognized." To be sure, there is a sense in which language is of "social" origin, and probably all conceptual thinking; and according to Baldwin<sup>12</sup> and others even the self is a "social" construction. Cooley<sup>13</sup> has shown that private reflection is often "social" in the sense that in our own private thought we often carry on imaginary conversations with ourselves. A bomb-throwing anarchist in the course of his own private and intensely anti-social thinking may make use of word imagery and concepts, carry on imaginary conversations with himself, and be keenly aware of his own personal identity as opposed to other *alteri*: shall we therefore call his thinking "social"? Used in this very broad sense, of course all religious values, and all values of every sort, even the most egoistic and anti-social, can be dubbed "social"! But surely such instances as an African native's prayer to the river-spirit to upset his enemy's canoe and destroy him,<sup>14</sup> and Hannah's prayer that she might bear a son are to be interpreted as cases in which the worshipers are thinking of what they regard

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Lovejoy, "The Desires of the Self-Conscious," *Columbia Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, etc.*, IV, 29-39; and Coe's review of Ames's book in the *American Journal of Theology*, XV, 305.

<sup>11</sup> *The Religion of the Semites*.

<sup>12</sup> *Social and Ethical Interpretations*.

<sup>13</sup> *Human Nature and the Social Order*, pp. 52 ff.; 359 ff.

<sup>14</sup> Mary H. Kingsley, *West African Studies*, p. 359.

as their own private desires, and not as matters of any great concern to their tribes.<sup>15</sup> It would therefore be misleading to call such values social from the subjective viewpoint of our definition. However, it is true that such values are socially recognized. Vengeance is legitimate and commendable according to West African ethics; to bear children was a great blessing, and to be barren a great misfortune in the opinion of Hebrew women of Hannah's time. Religious values, therefore, may be either personal or social in the thought of a worshiper; but they are always values of which his group approves, and in this sense "socially recognized."

Moreover, the endeavor is to secure the *conservation* of socially recognized values. The word "conservation" is not very satisfactory, but is the best that has yet been suggested. A person first recognizes something as a value, and then seeks to conserve it through religious means. Religion is thus thoroughly instrumental, a means to an end; it is not the discoverer of new values, but the conservator of values already appreciated. So while Todas seek the welfare of the buffalo cows and the purity of their milk through a ritual, and native Australians seek to conserve the lore of their fathers through initiation ceremonies, and American parents dedicate their children to the Christian faith at their baptism, the values implied in these practices were first recognized as values before the ceremonies properly became religious.

The definition here defended is entirely in agreement with Professor King's probable theory that religious ceremonies have often arisen from actions that originally were performed instinctively or habitually, without conscious values being attached to them.<sup>16</sup> In such cases three stages are distinguishable: (1) the habitual, unappreciated action; (2) the action, perhaps as a result of inhibition, becomes an object of general conscious attention and effort, and hence involves a socially recognized value; (3) the endeavor to conserve this socially recognized value through religious means, as set forth in our definition as a whole. If the Eucharist developed from an original social meal, as is sometimes

<sup>15</sup> In this connection Professor Fite's protest, "The Exaggeration of the Social," *Columbia Journal of Philosophy, etc.*, IV, 393 ff., and the systematic treatment in his *Individualism* deserve careful attention.

<sup>16</sup> *Op. cit.*, chaps. iii-v.

conjectured, it became a religious sacrament only when it reached the third stage. Professor King's theory of the origin of value, and the manner in which it becomes self-conscious, and, as I should say, socially recognized, can therefore be accepted, and the differentiation between religious values and other kinds of socially recognized values can be regarded as appearing after the emergence of socially recognized values in general. My differentia, later to be explained, will show the difference between religious values and other socially recognized values. Perhaps an imperfect comparison will make my position clearer. William James has somewhere said that "truth happens to an idea," that ideas first come into existence, and later sometimes become true. In a somewhat similar way I should say that socially recognized values first come into existence, and later some of them become religious. Religiosity "happens" to them when endeavor is made to conserve them in the manner set forth in our definition as a whole.

From the fact that religion is conservative of values already recognized, it does not follow that it is necessarily reactionary, though perhaps its chief peril is the danger of becoming so. It is possible for a religion to be progressive and constantly to endeavor to conserve new values. Values need only become socially recognized before a live and growing religion can adopt them, impart to them its sanction, and so afford them increased strength and stability. Christianity in ancient times assimilated and so conserved many of the best features of Greek philosophy and Roman law; it conserved and elevated what was best and most manly in mediaeval warfare through the institution of chivalry; in modern times the disciples of Luther, Calvin, and Loyola each in their own way have conserved the independent worth of the individual man; and in our own day there are indications that it is already beginning to throw the protection of its conserving mantle around the newly discovered categories of social justice with a celerity that is surprising when we consider how very recently these values have come into social recognition, and how radically opposed they are to the individualism of the century immediately preceding us.



Again, while strongly sympathizing with Professor Ames's<sup>17</sup> desire that religion shall conserve all the *highest* values, and while believing that this is the conception of religion which it is everyone's duty to seek to make a reality both in his own private life and in society, yet this seems to me to be a norm or an ideal for present endeavor and future attainment, and not a descriptive statement unqualifiedly applicable to all religions of the past and present. Istar, the primitive Semitic goddess, seems to have been thought to require of all women the sacrifice of their chastity as a religious duty long after womanly purity had come to be appreciated as a higher moral value.<sup>18</sup> The Olympian gods must have ceased to stand in the Hellenic mind for the highest values long before they ceased to be worshiped, or a more spiritual religion, able to assist in conserving their highest moral values, had become known to them. Even today many a Protestant minister may feel it to be his religious duty to preach vehemently against prize-fights in Nevada and Sunday baseball games, who would not use his pulpit to denounce the election of Senator Lorimer or to plead for higher wages for shop girls in city department stores. This may not at all mean that purity in politics and living wages for working girls do not seem to him the higher values; but because they are not values with which religion has been concerned in the past, he feels that they are secular matters involving political and economic questions in regard to which the minister of religion should be neutral. That we believe the minister to be mistaken in his judgment is irrelevant. His religious attitude is a fact, of which a subjective definition must take account.

If, then, our genus is sufficiently broad to cover all varieties of religion, we are now ready to consider the differentia, and to decide whether the latter is narrow enough to distinguish religion from all *other* endeavors to secure the conservation of socially recognized values.<sup>19</sup> The differentia is, *through specific actions that are believed to evoke some agency different from the ordinary ego of the individual, or from other merely human beings, and that imply a feeling of dependence upon this agency.*

<sup>17</sup> *Op. cit.*, *passim*.

<sup>18</sup> W. Robertson Smith, *op. cit.*, 2d ed., p. 59.

<sup>19</sup> Other endeavors are made through science, law, government, art, literature, etc. I recognize the existence of secular agencies, and that they are often successful and commendable.

Each term in the differentia is necessarily employed with a wide denotation, but will not seem vague when explained. No one can be more painfully aware of the ponderousness of the differentia than the writer, but he feels that it is less serious for a definition to be clumsy and technical than for it to be illogical by failing to mark off the precise boundaries of the term defined. That the definition is of practical value will be shown later, but first the terms of the differentia require explanation in detail.

"Specific actions" rather than ritual has been employed in order to make it clear that it includes any kind of act whatsoever that has been employed to serve the purpose—whether a dance about an arrow, a magic spell or incantation, an initiation or *Intichiuma* ceremony, counting the beads of a rosary, repeating the mystic word "Om," or the sacred *Allah il Allah*, or purely mental acts like concentrating one's thought upon the eightfold path of the Buddha, thoughtful meditation upon the meaning of life or the sublimity of nature, or the silent prayer a Christian might momentarily make when confronted by a sudden emergency. Such an action, whatever it may be, is always, in the mind of him who makes it, definite and specific. *It is a distinct act of his consciousness, enlisting in his service an agency other than the ego of that moment of his consciousness for the purpose of securing a value.* This characterization applies to all religious actions, and effectively differentiates them from non-religious actions.

The differentia proceeds to describe the agency employed. It is "some agency different from the ordinary ego of the individual, or from other merely human beings." This is only so general as is necessary to cover all the facts. The agency greatly varies in different religions, and is variously regarded by different individuals of the same religious faith. It may be some mysterious impersonal power in things known as *manitou*, or *wakonda*, or *mana*,<sup>20</sup> it may be a totem pole or a fetich or a charm or an amulet, a dead or living animal; it may be the visual image of *Humanité* in the features of one's own wife or mother;<sup>21</sup> it may be the Blessed Virgin Mary or one of the saints; it may be Nature as conceived

<sup>20</sup> King, *op. cit.*, chap. vi.

<sup>21</sup> Graham Wallas has given an interesting psychological explanation of this feature of Comte's religion, *Human Nature in Politics*, pp. 69 ff.

by a romantic poet like Shelley or a philosopher like Marcus Aurelius; it may be the deceased spirit of one's father, or it may be some other spirit or god or God; or it may simply be the reserve outlooks and vistas furnished by one's own subconscious self as the result of mystic trance or rational meditation. The agency may even be a human being like an Egyptian king or a Roman emperor provided he is believed to be not *merely* human, but in some respect divine.<sup>22</sup> The expression as stated in the definition is believed to be broad enough to include every agency through which the conservation of values has been sought, or conceivably could be sought, in a manner that the seeker himself would regard as religious.<sup>23</sup>

While it is my own belief that the agency tends to be thought of as personal, and that a personal monotheistic God is both intellectually and morally the most satisfying way to conceive of this agency, and that in the religion of the future the agency will so be conceived, it is impossible to ignore the well-established fact that not only have there been highly developed atheistic and pantheistic religions in the past, but that at the present time the conception of a personal God is not at all prominent or important in the minds of a few sincerely devout and profoundly religious people.<sup>24</sup> Consequently it is impossible to describe the agency as necessarily personal in a psychological definition that is descriptive and not normative.

The last clause of the differentia is intended to complete the differentiation of religion from science, and also to emphasize an

<sup>22</sup> Frazer gives numerous instances of the worship of living human beings, *Golden Bough*, I, 139-66.

<sup>23</sup> The very wide denotation of the differentia is illustrated by the following incident. While I was writing this paper, a friend came into my office, and remarked that he did not know if he was religious or not, that he is not sure whether he believes in the existence of a God at all, and that this question does not interest him; but that he does believe that society is now advancing toward higher things, and that the universe is so organized as always to make a forward progress possible provided we do our part. In answer to my question, he added that he likes to meditate upon society and the world in this way, that it gives him confidence and a better grip upon himself. We decided that his deliberately putting himself in this contemplative attitude for the purpose of moral reinforcement is an instance of religion, and is included by the definition.

<sup>24</sup> J. H. Leuba, "The Contents of Religious Consciousness," *Monist*, XV, 536-73.

important aspect of the religious attitude. The scientific attitude toward nature always, as Professor Leuba has shown,<sup>25</sup> reveals a mechanical exploitation of nature. Nature is inert, passive, and man may bend and manipulate it according to his needs if he discovers the "laws" of nature, which are of course only descriptive formulae of the succession of phenomena. On the other hand, the religious attitude always implies a "feeling of dependence" toward power greater than our ordinary selves, and not an attempt to exploit this power.<sup>26</sup> As religions evolve, the affective attitude toward the agency is vastly enriched, and tends to become a feeling, not only of dependence, but also of obligation, admiration, love, and spiritual aspiration.

The important aspect of the religious attitude emphasized in this last clause is that of feeling. The very great importance of this has been eloquently set forth by Auguste Sabatier,<sup>27</sup> and, with more accurate psychological analysis, by Professor Starbuck<sup>28</sup> and Professor Pratt.<sup>29</sup> Not only does all valuation involve feeling, but this phase is more prominent in religion than in morals or ethics, or perhaps even aesthetics. The richness, warmth, and depth of religious feeling in its real worth and inner meaning can never be justly interpreted by the intellectual categories of the psychologist—thin, cold-blooded, and abstract as they necessarily are. As no one but the lover can describe his affection for his beloved, and his language conveys only to other lovers any comprehension of what he really feels, so only the saint and mystic can interpret the love of God, and they only to those who have experienced like rapture. While all psychologists must confess that intellectual analysis cannot penetrate and much less appreciate the mysteries of the heart, nevertheless most of them would probably refuse to accept as established fact the claim of Pro-

<sup>25</sup> *The Psychological Origin and Nature of Religion*, chap. ii.

<sup>26</sup> Malebranche speaks as if man may exploit God temporarily, but of course he does not think of this as religious. *Recherche de la vérité*, chap. ii, p. 76. Cf. W. K. Wright, *The Ethical Significance of Feeling*, etc., p. 19.

<sup>27</sup> *Outlines of a Philosophy of Religion*.

<sup>28</sup> "The Feelings and their Place in Religion," *American Journal of Religious Psychology and Education*, I, 168-86.

<sup>29</sup> *The Psychology of Religious Belief*.

fessor Starbuck that feeling is an independent source of knowledge, notwithstanding the circumstance that such a claim seems to have been favored by the high authority of William James.<sup>30</sup> While this claim certainly deserves careful consideration, it is much more prudent for a definition of religion at present to view feeling exclusively in its affective function as a phase of the general conative attitude that has been described.

Although the differentia has largely been derived from a study of Professor Leuba's contributions,<sup>31</sup> his expression "psychic, superhuman power" has been avoided. The instances cited by Professor King and Professor Ames of religion prior to the recognition of psychical agency, the difficulty of bringing esoteric Buddhism under this head, and the contemporary "religion of science"<sup>32</sup> furnish good reasons for avoiding the term "psychic." "Superhuman" seems hardly a correct description for cases where individuals admit that they may be drawing upon their own subconscious or other reserve powers, and that while they know that they are drawing upon an agency other than the conscious ego of the moment, they are not sure that they are going outside the total sum of their own psychical resources.<sup>33</sup> The term "anthropopathic" seems unexceptionable as employed by Professor Leuba, but would be a dangerous term if it came into general use, and became adopted by less careful writers. It suggests too much affinity with "anthropomorphism" and the "pathetic fallacy," which though often found in religion are by no means universal properties of it.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>30</sup> *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, concluding chapters.

<sup>31</sup> See footnote 8, above.

<sup>32</sup> I think that Haeckel's "natural religion," *The Riddle of the Universe*, pp. 300, 306, chap. xviii, etc., and even the forlorn but resolute attitude toward the universe expressed in Huxley's *Romanes Lecture* are religious.

<sup>33</sup> Professor Leuba's own articles mention instances. The most striking case which I have seen reported is given by Miss Tanner, *Psychological Bulletin*, 1907, pp. 33-36.

<sup>34</sup> That is, if these terms are used with reproach. If a realist chooses to use these terms so broadly as to regard the individual's belief in other personalities, when he can only see the bodies of other men, as "anthropomorphic," or "pathetic," we can hardly object to his describing religion thus. It is obviously no reproach to religion to be classified as coming under the sole process by which any of us can escape

The present definition is compatible with Professor Coe's very suggestive conception of religious value:

Something like this is characteristic of the religious attitude universally. Through all the differentiations and enrichments of human purpose, a god, or some functional equivalent, has served as a concrete expression of a tendency to subsume particular values in a single type in such a way that they are not only included within it, but also raised, so to speak, to a higher power of themselves.<sup>35</sup>

According to this theory, religion evidently seeks the conservation of value through an agency other than the individual's ordinary ego, and therefore our definition regards a part of Professor Coe's interpretation of religious value as a descriptive statement of fact. Undoubtedly too, as religions have advanced, the tendency for these values to be raised "to a higher power of themselves" has increased. And all must agree that his noble conception of religious value as a summation or synthesis of all values in a unitary whole indicates what at any rate ought to be the line of present religious endeavor, and constitutes a splendid ideal which the influence of such inspiring prophets as Professor Coe is doing much to make an actuality.

The various religious phenomena which the psychologist interprets can all be brought under our definition. Prayer, for instance, whenever it is clearly distinguishable from the spell, is the endeavor to secure the conservation of socially recognized values through "an imaginative social process"<sup>36</sup> or conversation between the ordinary ego of the individual and the agency invoked. Sacrifice is the offering of gifts to propitiate the agency. All religious ceremonials consist chiefly in elaborations of prayer and sacrifice. Sacraments are rites which are believed either spiritually or magically to effect some desired change in the believer by means of the agency invoked. The evangelical revival or mission is a solipsism! Professor R. B. Perry makes a good working distinction when he says that, though the religious consciousness creates a working relationship between man and the universe, this is not a case of the pathetic fallacy unless it incorrectly *reckons with* the inner feeling which it attributes to the universe (*Approach to Philosophy*, p. 111).

<sup>35</sup> *Columbia Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, etc.*, 1908, p. 253.

<sup>36</sup> Anna L. Strong, *The Psychology of Prayer*; Ames, *op. cit.*, chap. viii; Farnell, *The Evolution of Religion*, Lecture IV.

different device to secure a similar purpose; and conversion and sanctification are changes in the personality of the individual attributed to a divine agency. Myths, whenever they have religious significance at all,<sup>37</sup> are naïve attempts to account for the origin and validity of practices employed in religion, while doctrines and creeds are more elaborate rational and philosophical explanations and justifications. Institutions, like the church or synagogue, are organizations for the purpose of preserving and propagating methods of religious endeavor for the conservation of socially recognized values. The central feature of all religion is this endeavor, as set forth in our definition; and the various details of sacrifice, prayer, and other ritual, and the rise of myths, dogmas, and institutions are incidents that appear in the carrying-out of the endeavor.

In the next place let us consider whether our definition has succeeded in differentiating religion from the terms with which it is most often confused: animism and magic, in the case of primitive religions, and morals, ethics, and aesthetics, in the case of higher religions.

Animism and magic may or may not be religious. They become religious when employed in the endeavor to secure the conservation of socially recognized values. Otherwise they are non-religious and on occasion they may become anti-religious. Magic employed in Buddhist prayer wheels and the Christian sign of the cross is religious; while witches' charms used to secure what the individual's conscience regards as wrong<sup>38</sup> because it is inimical to the recognized social values of his tribe is black magic, and anti-religious. The simple belief in spirits about one is animism, and may be entirely non-religious. The endeavor to induce these spirits by means of offerings to adopt a desired attitude so as to conserve socially recognized values, is a religious use of animism.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Myths are often, of course, aesthetic or speculative descriptions of the unknown, having nothing to do with religion as here conceived.

<sup>38</sup> The clearest statements of this view of conscience are by Mezes, *Ethics, Descriptive and Explanatory*, pp. 130-33; 163-84; and Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics*, Part I.

<sup>39</sup> This is true, even if the attitude desired is the simple departure of the spirits, which Jane E. Harrison believes to have been the chief religious motive of most Greeks in the sixth century B.C., *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, pp. 7 ff.

This definition therefore renders possible a clearer-cut statement of the relationship between animism, magic, and religion than has characterized most of the literature of the subject. Of course it must be frankly admitted that any definition of religion will necessarily appear somewhat artificial when applied to primitive peoples who often do not have these words in their vocabularies, and do not distinguish religion in their own minds from magic and morals. But the distinction as here given can be successfully employed wherever it is practicable to employ the term religion at all in interpreting their subjective attitudes.

The distinction between religion and morals is not to be made in terms of the content of judgments of good and evil. There is no moral content that is always religious, and none that is always non-religious. The values of religion are all in some sense moral values, though they are occasionally outworn moral values that have survived from a bygone age. What furnishes the differentia of religious from merely moral value is the peculiar nature of the *agency* through which the religious value is conserved. As our definition states, the religious agency involves a power different from ordinary human activity, evoked through some peculiar and specific act that partakes more or less of the nature of ritual. Which of the values of a tribe will be attached to this agency and so become religious depends in part upon what other agencies are also open to them, between which they can make a selection. In the case of a primitive people the values which they cannot otherwise secure are likely to be those which will become religious. Food, and protection from, and victory over, enemies are primitive religious values when food is scarce and enemies numerous and dangerous. With advance in civilization the values sought to be conserved through religion become limited, both by the experience that some things desired cannot be obtained in this way, and also by the rising conviction that religious worship should be confined to higher and more spiritual values, and not cheapened by the search through it for more sordid and material advantages.<sup>40</sup>

The distinction between religion and ethics is similar. Ethics is the attempt to put morals upon a systematic basis by philo-

<sup>40</sup> Strong, *op. cit.*, chap. ii.



sophically defining and defending its principles. Religion is one of the agencies available for conserving some of the values recognized by ethics. As society advances the general tendency is for religion increasingly to conserve the more important ethical values. This tendency, already marked in the nature religions, becomes the rule in the ethical religions. The chief exception to this general tendency is due to the conservatism of religion, which causes it sometimes to remain attached to less important ethical values than those for which contemporary moral reformers and ethical philosophers are contending. The exponents of religion were thus on the side opposed to the best ethical thought of their times in ancient Israel in the period preceding the exile and in Athens in the time of Socrates. It would, however, be incorrect to say that in a conflict between religion and ethics the latter is always right and religion always wrong. A modern instance to the contrary would be the somewhat shallow and over-rationalized sophistication of certain eighteenth-century philosophers in contrast with the religious thought of their times.

The differentiation of religion from aesthetics is also provided for in our definition by the emphasis upon the *agency* employed. The religious endeavor is never an end in itself. Religious interest is always mediated. Aesthetic contemplation is interesting on its own account; it is an end in itself. Religious meditation and prayer are always for the sake of conserving socially recognized values important to the believer at other times even more than at the moment of worship. Religious values are always deadly earnest, and there is genuine faith in the agency invoked. True, religion may make use of aesthetic agencies in order to impress its values, and make them more attractive. But in this case the position of art is very humble. She is only the handmaiden of religion, who herself is the servant employed by humanity in the most serious business of life. And as the lot of the slave is seldom enviable, the position of art in religious worship has frequently been undignified, and very poor art has often met with more favor on the part of religion than its exclusively aesthetic value could have warranted. Moreover, ages of comparative religious shallowness like the Italian renaissance have often produced the

finest religious art; while, as in the case of the Puritans, movements of deep religious earnestness have sometimes rejected the services of art altogether. The differences between religion and aesthetics are so great, and the resemblances so superficial, that one wonders how the two could ever have been confused. The blunder could have been made only by chance tourists who have visited the temple of religion, admired the splendid statues and altars, sniffed the incense, listened to the music, gazed at the beautiful frescoes, and gone away fancying that these features, the merest external adornments and veriest accidents of religion, constituted her heartfelt purpose.

Nor is the religious symbol a case of make-believe in the playful, aesthetic sense. Religious symbols vary infinitely. Within Christianity symbols have been partly material—images and pictures—and partly verbal figures of speech, such as characterizing God as a “King” or “Father,” and Christ as an “elder brother.” Whether material or mental, the function of the symbol is to furnish more concrete and tangible imagery for profound and perhaps otherwise inexpressible meaning. In this sense the symbol is a representative device, just as a national flag is a representative device, though in reality only a piece of bunting; and, like the flag, the religious symbol gets its significance from values believed to be genuine and existential.<sup>42</sup>

Far from being sportive or playful in character, symbolism is one of the most important and serious instruments through which religion achieves its purpose. By means of symbolism, religion conserves moral values by representing them, not in coldly intellectual form, but embodied in powerful emotional imagery so earnest and so affecting as to grip the hearts and transform the inner lives of all men. Noble-minded Pharisees and Stoics had long preached to Hebrew and Graeco-Roman civilizations nearly all the moral values which the new Testament contains. Only, however, when the conceptions of Messiah and Logos could be recognized concretely and humanly in the person of the infant Jesus borne by a virgin mother in Augustus’ time, grown into manhood to be the forgiving Christ that had suffered and died upon

<sup>42</sup> In an ontological sense, so far as the worshiper is capable of such a conception.

a cross in Tiberius' time,<sup>42</sup> and still operating in the vividly concrete and tangible baptismal water and eucharistic bread and wine, could these conceptions become in any sense vital in the inner feelings and experiences of all classes of men, and cause to be assimilated such inestimably rich but theretofore external moral values as universal human brotherhood, self-sacrifice, and charity.

Though religious worship and sociability are often combined, the two interests are quite distinct. Thus many primitive feasts and dances are seasons of playfulness, and yet have a religious aspect, and are institutions of social control.<sup>43</sup> At the present time many American Protestant churches make so much of social entertainments that European visitors have called them "social clubs." A little reflection will convince the reader, however, that the entertainments are valued by primitive priests and modern religious workers, not primarily because they afford amusement, but for serious ulterior purposes. So far as such entertainments are religious at all, it is because they appeal to a mediate interest.<sup>44</sup>

Our subjective definition of religion has now been set forth, and it has been shown that it is successful in revealing the relationships and differences between religion, magic, morals, ethics, and aesthetics. However, perhaps the reader now feels that after all the definition merely affords a descriptive formulation of religion and assists in placing it in a classification with other disciplines, but that it does not throw much light upon the questions in which he is most interested. He perhaps protests: What light does this subjective definition throw upon the actual function of religion in human society? Does it throw any light upon the still more important question whether religion is merely imaginative suggestion and superstition, or a veritable source of knowledge about the universe?

<sup>42</sup> It seems to me that one of the main psychological advantages that Christianity had in its contest with Mithraism for supremacy was the immeasurably more concrete and human appeal of a symbolism grown up about the incident of Golgotha than any that could grow up about the killing of a bull.

<sup>43</sup> King, *op. cit.*, pp. 100 f.

<sup>44</sup> For the distinction between mediate and immediate interest and the identification of the latter with play, see Dewey's pamphlet, *Interest as Related to Will*, pp. 15 ff. (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1903).

These two questions, which for convenience may be called the sociologico-historical and the metaphysical, are of course extremely difficult, and within the limits of this paper can only briefly be touched upon. However, it can be shown that our definition is of some assistance in defining both of these problems, and in affording some hints as to their solution.

To consider the sociologico-historical problem first. The investigator of this problem will first need to know what actions, customs, beliefs, rites, and institutions in any society are to be classified as religious. Our definition will serve as a guide in ascertaining this. Having accomplished this classification, the inquirer will be ready to face the question: How far do these religious acts succeed in conserving values? He will at once discover that sometimes the religious endeavor is successful, and sometimes it is not. The Australian initiation ceremonies undoubtedly do make the boys feel many responsibilities, and they do promote good-will and solidarity within the tribe. They thus really serve the social function aimed at. On the other hand, the religious-magical ceremonies for increasing the supply of totemic plants and animals obviously are not successful; we must regard them as mere superstition. Again, sometimes the religious acts are successful, but for other reasons than the worshipers suppose. For instance, Miss Kingsley says that in some African tribes spirits act as the police force:

You will see this strikingly illustrated when, as you walk along a bush path far from human habitation, you notice a little cleared space by the side of the path; it is neatly laid with plantain leaves, and on it are various little articles for sale—leaf tobacco, a few yams, and so on, and beside each article are so many stones, beans, or cowries, which indicate the price of each article, and you will see, either sitting in the middle of the things, or swinging by a bit of Tie Tie from a branch above, Egba or a relation of his—the market god—who will visit with death any theft from the shop, or any cheating in price given, or any taking-away of sums left by previous customers.<sup>45</sup>

While it is clear that religion effects the security of a socially recognized value in this last instance, it does so by means of suggestive fear, and not through the spiritual agency imagined by the natives.

<sup>45</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 408.

In all cases of religious endeavor the investigator will find, I believe, that, whether the socially recognized value directly aimed at in the religious act is conserved or not, and whether it is conserved in the way worshipers imagine or in some different way, religion always performs one function. This function is to effect a certain amount of social and moral solidarity and conservatism within the group of worshipers. Furthermore, an empirical study will show that as a rule this function of religion is beneficial. Society needs a strong conservative, centripetal agency to solidify its forces and keep it from losing the values it has learned to recognize and appreciate. In performing this socializing and conserving function, religion is comparable to political, moral, and economic forces as a factor of prime importance and value in the evolution of the human race. The great service of religion in knitting men together and keeping them loyal to the achievements of past generations (which in any age must be immeasurably greater than whatever new ideas religion has not yet had time to assimilate) is so great that one wonders why it has not been more emphasized. In comparison with other religions, one great point of superiority on the part of Christianity is that it has performed this function more effectively and more in adjustment with the other factors that make for progress. In the Occident at least, Christianity has never for any great length of time been a drag upon real progress, while it has conserved and heightened moral consciousness in every age, and several times has probably saved civilization from serious disaster.<sup>46</sup>

That Christianity has, however, sometimes been more effective as a conservator of socially recognized values than at others is illustrated by a comparison between the religious history of France and England in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Within the state church in France Ultramontanist secured a complete triumph during the reign of Louis XV, with the consequence that, thenceforth it could conserve only those values already recognized,

<sup>46</sup> E.g., at the fall of the Roman empire. The development of rationalism and free scientific inquiry and criticism, which began to be destructive with the modern Enlightenment period, was not attended by the irresistible moral and social decay of the Greek enlightenment, in consequence of Christianity.

or such new values as could win the approval, not only of the French clerics, but also of the foreign Curia at Rome. No merely national movement of moral revival or enthusiasm that in any way conflicted with the established inheritance of the past could receive religious sanction. Consequently eighteenth-century reformers in France sprang up entirely without the church, and felt that religion was their bitterest enemy, and Voltaire's epithet *l'infame* expressed their general attitude. Since the Revolution, the divergence between religious faith and political and social progress has widened, and the inadequacy of the Roman Catholic religion as a conserver of modern French values has become more and more painfully apparent. The condemnation of such a socially and morally helpful and seemingly theologically harmless organization as the Sillon is a recent illustration of the complete hopelessness of the present situation. With the church ineffective as a centripetal force, the centrifugal forces broke all bounds during the Revolution; and, since, the nation has had to develop as best it could, handicapped by the ineffectiveness of what normally should have been a conservative without being an obstructive force in its life. Notwithstanding its deplorable maladjustment, however, the church has doubtless on the whole exercised a beneficent influence in all periods of French history, including the present.

On the other hand, though the Church of England contained about the same abuses as the French church at the opening of the eighteenth century, it was English to the core, and an organic part of the national life. The latitudinarian policy of its rulers did much to win the good-will of dissenters, and to render all classes contented, and loyal to the reigning dynasty. Dead as the early eighteenth-century church seemed to be, as a consequence of perhaps exaggerated anxiety to avoid the follies and extravagances of the "enthusiasm" of the previous century, the fires of religion were only slumbering, and quickened to new life in the mid-eighteenth-century evangelical and early nineteenth-century tractarian movements. One of the forces that helped to save England from turbulent revolutions like those across the Channel was the healthfully conservative but not excessively reactionary influence of religion.

To make it clear that the comparison just given is not intended to be a partisan brief for Protestantism, one might add that in the seventeenth century conditions were reversed. Catholicism was then a healthy factor in the French national life; while prior to 1688 religion had been out of adjustment in England. The emphatic nationalism of the last century has probably been the chief reason for the maladjustment of the Ultramontane Roman church in many Latin countries. With the growth of internationalism, which seems likely to be a characteristic mark of our century, as illustrated just now in the peace and labor movements, it is quite possible that the universal Roman Catholic church, if reasonably modernized, may through its cosmopolitan character and spirit do much to bind the nations together, and to conserve the moral values of international concord, good-will, law, and justice. Modern Judaism has admirably performed the conserving functions of religion, and held before its worshippers lofty moral and spiritual ideals: until recently its chief limitation, now showing signs of happily being overcome, has been an inclination to confine somewhat the extension of its socially recognized values to those within its own communion.

No student of American history can fail to recognize the immense value of religion as a factor in our national development, keeping us in some measure true to the ideals of our fathers, sobering our consciences, and preventing us from becoming wholly sordid in the tremendous industrial and commercial expansion through which we have passed. The fact that our moral conceptions have at all stood the strain of this rapid material development, and that political and social corruption and decay in America today are not hopeless and irremediable as they were in Rome during the last century of the Republic, is due, I believe, chiefly to the vitality of religion among us as a factor effectively conservative of our socially recognized values. So far as this is not fully appreciated, the explanation probably is that the very great diversity of confessions in America, due to our diverse origin, has kept religious bodies from co-operating as effectively as they should to further their common purposes. There has also, of course, been a failure to conserve religiously the newly found, but in our present con-

ditions supremely important, values of social justice,<sup>47</sup> such as equality of opportunity, just wages, sanitation, pure food, suppression of white slavery, honest stocks and bonds, conservation of national resources, and the like. But all indications point to the not far-distant overcoming of both of these defects.

In estimating the social function of religion the immense value of its apparently more individual aspects, like the expansion and enrichment of one's personality through meditation, prayer, and conversion, should also be taken into account. Spatial limitations permit only a reference here, however, to this side of religion, which, besides, has been psychologically treated in the well-known works of James, Starbuck, Coe, Cutten, and others. Its supreme importance is illustrated by the decline of the ancient Roman religion, largely due, as Professor William Warde Fowler<sup>48</sup> believes, to its too exclusive concern with the interests of the family and state, and consequent neglect of the inner life experiences and needs of individuals.

No psychological interpretation can of course claim to settle the question of the metaphysical validity of religion. However, if religion as here defined has performed the social function claimed for it, most philosophers will admit that any adequate conception of reality must afford it some recognition, although, of course, they may believe that theological structures cannot in the nature of the case be more secure than the philosophical foundations on which they are erected. The three philosophical schools of our generation that have the largest following in America are those of absolute idealism, realism, and pragmatism. While the absolute idealist may hesitate to accord religion a place fully equivalent with philosophy as an interpretation of the Absolute, he will at least regard it as one of the very highest orders of appearance;<sup>49</sup> and science, we must remember, for him is no more. The younger

<sup>47</sup> Cf. James H. Tufts, "The Adjustment of the Church to the Psychological Conditions of the Present," *American Journal of Theology*, 1908, pp. 177-88, for constructive suggestions.

<sup>48</sup> *The Religious Experience of the Roman People*, pp. 287, 340 f., 358, and *passim*.

<sup>49</sup> Taylor, *Elements of Metaphysics*, pp. 381-407; *Problem of Conduct*, chap. viii; Royce, *World and the Individual*, *passim*; Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 2d ed., pp. 438-54, 531-33.



realists have not yet so fully developed their philosophy as to make its religious implications clear. However, the definition here advanced in its emphasis upon religion as a practical attitude bears a good deal of resemblance to Professor Perry's interpretation, although it puts more emphasis upon conation and less upon belief.<sup>50</sup> Of course the definition of religion here defended, being functional, has most affinity to the pragmatism of the Chicago school. From their point of view, if it be conceded that religion has played the functional part in social evolution here claimed for it, this fact would seem to warrant full recognition of its claims to metaphysical validity, the only qualification possibly being, as Professor King remarks, "If the question of the reality of the order of existence postulated by religion is raised, we should have to say that probably all the concepts of religion fall *short* of an adequate account of experience rather than that they attribute too *much* to it."<sup>51</sup> Our interpretation furnishes support to such defenses of religion as Professor Foster's.<sup>52</sup> It is also in accordance with those features in the philosophy of William James that have been accepted by other pragmatists, without being committed to his bolder speculations upon mysticism, telepathy, the subconscious, and the like.<sup>53</sup>

The upshot of the matter, as is known to the sober student of the history of philosophy who does not allow his perspective to be lost in the cloud of dust that always accompanies contemporary controversies, is that every system of metaphysics is an attempt to interpret the implications of the experience of the age. If religion is a vital factor in this experience, as I believe sociological and historical investigations must show it always is, metaphysicians will be only too glad to afford religion as much validity as is necessary to insure its intelligent and effective employment for the phases of experience in which it is found to be practically useful.

<sup>50</sup> *Approach to Philosophy*, pp. 53-114; *Harvard Theological Review*, II, 183-85.

<sup>51</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 340 f.

<sup>52</sup> *The Finality of the Christian Religion; The Function of Religion in Man's Struggle for Existence*.

<sup>53</sup> Two valuable theological estimates of pragmatism are: Lyman's *Theology and Human Problems*; and D. C. Macintosh, "Can Pragmatism Furnish a Philosophical Basis for Theology?" *Harvard Theological Review*, III, 126-35.

In a word, the social and personal usefulness of religion once established, the question of its metaphysical validity will largely take care of itself.

In conclusion, then, it is claimed that the subjective definition of religion formulated in the earlier part of this paper has proved adequate to cover the facts, and to differentiate religion from related subjects; that the definition is of further practical value in furnishing a preliminary step toward the solution of the problem of the social function of religion, and indicates that religion, at least when rightly adjusted, has performed an important and valuable function in modern life; and, if this last claim is accepted, that the validity of religious faith can be successfully defended upon the ground of contemporary metaphysics.